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ARE MODERN INDUSTRY AND CITY LIFE UNFAVORABLE TO THE FAMILY?

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The essence of the question under discussion.—It is *not*: Is life in an industrial city more unfavorable to the family than it formerly was, i. e., are we advancing? Nor, Is life in an industrial city more unfavorable to sound family life than country residence? but rather, What are the facts about urban conditions which have a harmful tendency, and are these conditions necessarily inherent in urban organization of industry or are they capable of improvement by known means? If not by known means then at what points should we direct and concentrate our investigations? It is not necessary here to reiterate the proof that the cities are growing rapidly in all parts of the civilized world, nor to explain the movement cityward. This is already familiar to all. If any tendency is part of destiny and fate this seems to be such. Even when people are perfectly aware of the effect of urban ways on longevity, they seem to prefer the brief and merry, or at least exciting, career in cities to the cycle of far and drowsy Cathay.

“Modern industry” is almost equivalent to “city life,” because the great industry, the factory system, builds cities around the chimneys of steam engines and electric plants. Cheap production of commodities by machinery requires some degree of proximity of operations. Our systems of transportation and trade work in the same direction. We may then, ignoring exceptional conditions, discuss directly the effects of urban residence on family life, and treat the mill, shop, and factory as special aspects of city life.

The dwelling, the street, the places of work and recreation are the outward and physical factors which directly affect the fortunes of urban workmen and their families.

The habits and conduct of the people under these outward

conditions are also causal factors, and all the influences react upon each other and reverberate in countless ways.

I. What are the facts in relation to the *physical well-being* of the family in cities? The social function of the normal family is to maintain the life of the community at its best by producing, rearing, and educating sound and vigorous offspring.

The statisticians have assembled for us the evidences of relatively high morbidity and mortality in cities, and it is not necessary to reproduce the tables; the general results are sufficient for our present purpose.¹

Density of population is characteristic of cities and tends to increase morbidity and mortality. The death rate in cities is generally, though not always, higher than in the surrounding country. This is true of every state in the Union. The death rate is usually greater in the ratio of the size of the city, although the improvements in modern sanitary methods are telling with better effect on cities than on rural communities owing to the more prompt and the better administered application of science under municipal government.

The death rate of infants has hitherto been especially marked in cities owing to the defective supply of milk, and probably to the neglect of infants by mothers who work for a living away from home. The exhaustion of girls in factories and mills tends to increase the mortality of these infants after marriage.

The danger from infectious diseases is increased in crowded tenements. Tuberculosis and pneumonia are made more common and fatal by the fact that common halls and corridors carry the germs of these dreaded diseases into every apartment, so that a single patient quickly exposes numerous neighbors. When light and ventilation are defective these evils rage with all the more intense virulence.

The diseases caused by occupations affect the vigor of the family in various ways; directly by impairing the general health

¹ Mayo-Smith, *Statistics and Sociology*, pp. 128 ff. (deaths), pp. 154 ff. (sickness); Weber, *Growth of Cities*, chaps. vi, vii; Westergaard, *Morbidität und Mortalität*; Bailey, *Modern Social Conditions*, p. 243; Newsholme, *Vital Statistics*; these give the primary sources.

and poisoning the germ plasm, and indirectly by reducing the food supply and the comforts of clothing and dwelling.

In the absence of adequate and compulsory sickness and invalid insurance the cessation of income of the stricken husband and father means gradual starvation and the diseases which always prey on bodies imperfectly nourished. The people of the United States have not yet become awake to the misery which assails the domestic life from this cause; and we are behind all other civilized nations in providing insurance. We have, after stubborn resistance of the *laissez-faire* tribe, secured compulsory poor law and compulsory education. The next logical step is compulsory insurance in its whole range, on grounds of public health.

Not only injuries and diseases caused by occupation, but also the employment of women and children under unfavorable conditions is a factor in the destruction of sound family life; and, as a rule, these evils are more serious in urban than in rural industries. Exposure to the elements and the rapid increase of complicated machinery, sometimes driven by steam power, are facts of importance in agricultural occupations, and require more attention and investigation than they have hitherto received.

The dwelling has been the center of anxious interest in cities for a long time. The sweated industries, carried on in the same rooms where the family lives, are more difficult to control than the factory industries, and they are a perpetual menace to health. After the great work of De Forest and Veiller on the tenement-house problem little remains to be said in this connection; although local investigation must be made to arouse the conscience of the people and authorities of any particular community. We need another volume, based on scientific study, of the perils to health in country residences. It is amazing how little impression an investigation in Pittsburgh or New York makes in St. Louis or Chicago; it is so easy to parry a stroke by pleading a difference of situation.

The places of recreation and culture in cities are often crowded and almost always perilous to health and hence to the

family. Theaters, dance halls, saloons, and even churches are not rarely means of infection.

How far are these evils due necessarily to industry and to urban life? and how far are they preventable, avoidable by known measures? Preventive medicine and public hygiene have already done more for cities than for the country and we seem to be at the beginning of a powerful and concerted movement to combat all these evils.²

II. Are the conditions of city life favorable or unfavorable to *fecundity*? The answer must be guarded and must take account of the elements of population, occupations, presence of immigrants, age groups, demands of fashionable society, etc.

"In Germany the birth-rate for the entire country is from 4 to 6 per cent. higher than for cities of 50,000 and over."³ In Hungary this is true. In Massachusetts the birth-rate was higher in towns. In Sweden the birth-rate of cities has gained upon and passed the rural birth-rate. The birth-rates of large cities, as London and Paris, are slowly falling.

The social position of the family has a decisive influence, the births being in inverse ratio to income.

"The most obvious explanation of a high birth-rate would be a large proportion of women in the child-bearing period. The cities have a larger percentage of such persons, hence for this reason, and not because of greater fecundity of city women, do the cities often have a high birth-rate."⁴ The cost of living is greater in cities than in the country, and the necessities of life must be paid for in cash. Income is more uncertain. Multitudes of unskilled workingmen are liable to discharge on an hour's notice; and this is true of clerks and salesmen. This uncertainty of income is an important factor in relation to the production of offspring.

Furthermore, the city child is not so early a producer as the child on the farm, whether boy or girl. Very early a rural child

² See Dr. Kober's paper on "Industrial Diseases" in *Bulletin No. 75, Bureau of Labor*, 1908.

³ Bailey, *Modern Social Conditions*, p. 108.

⁴ *Weber*, p. 331.

can be a real aid in kitchen or field. This can be modified by earlier trade training from the sixth grade up, as is now provided in some cities for half-day schools and shops.

The attractions of pleasure and comfort make a stronger appeal to the urban dweller than to the farmer. The difficulty of securing quiet and retirement during pregnancy in a tenement house or expensive apartment residence is a factor of no slight significance, especially when public sentiment among women makes maternity ridiculous.

III. Communistic urban habits tend to create and sustain communistic beliefs and sentiments; and these are distinctively unfavorable to the principles upon which the monogamic family is based. Paul Göhre describes his experience in a German industrial community, where men work all day in a common shop, eat their luncheon in crowds, seek their entertainments in throngs, travel in a mob, and, before marriage, satisfy their sexual appetites in a common brothel. The same phenomena may be observed in any large industrial town. If the type of family we have known and which is maintained in the country is desirable, then these forces must be regarded as disintegrating and perilous.

Are the evils of such communistic living avoidable? Are there socializing influences mixed up with the dangerous tendencies which may well be fostered?

IV. Certainly there are advantages in urban life which must favorably affect the domestic institution. There are wider and more rapid means of communication and of receiving impressions; although the rural telephone and trolley are making marvelous changes outside the cities. There are more mental stimuli in the thronged street than in the sleepy lanes, and along the quiet waters of pastures and meadows.

It is possible that the urban socialization of industries gives to the city woman the advantages of slavery without its cruelty, and thus creates a wider margin of leisure—the first condition of higher culture. Certainly, as all admit, our largest leisure class is made up of women from whom wealth and modern mechanical devices have taken away numerous household cares and labors.

V. Divorce is an effect of urban conditions and beliefs; it is

an effect of evil and sometimes the milder evil selected out of many worse miseries. In the United States in about 95 per cent. of the cases the rate is higher in the counties in which large cities are situated than in the counties where the population is principally rural;⁵ and this in spite of the fact that Catholics gather in cities.

Only of recent years has the prevalence of venereal diseases, and especially gonorrhea, been carefully studied. Even yet the public is not fully aware of the domestic misery caused by these diseases contracted by extra-marital intercourse by men and communicated to innocent wives and children. The records of divorce courts rarely mention the real ground on which good women apply for divorce, and the federal statistics, therefore, must be studied in the light of investigations on which judicial records throw little light.

Now, the social evil is distinctly an urban evil, and so far as it leads to divorce must be charged in great part to the conditions of urban life. The same is true of the use of narcotic poisons and alcohol to which so much domestic ruin can be traced. It is not creditable to many of the scientific men of America that they have underestimated the importance of this factor and some of them have so written that their sentences are used in advertisements of brewers and distillers to blind the eyes of the uneducated.

VI. Some writers have emphasized the value of city life as an agency of social selection; the strong and capable are given a career while the feeble in vitality and character go to ruin and are weeded out. But this kind of social selection is too costly; its lightning strokes kill many of the finest human beings along with the neglected; and not seldom the nursery of deadly germs, physical and moral, is in the homes and streets of the so-called unfit. Those who fall into the doom clutch at the fair and competent and drag them to ruin with themselves.

The incompetent must either be educated to fill a useful place and feel strong for productive labor, or be sent under guard to die at peace in celibate colonies. That is the only social selection

⁵ Bailey, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

which is worthy of the name of rational; all the rest is wasteful accident, trusting to chance which plays with loaded dice.

None of the urban plagues which have been mentioned are in the realm of destiny or blind nature; all are products of human choice and conduct; and by human energy, guided by science, they can gradually be diminished or removed; but none will disappear without effort. Even laziness may sometimes be cured by medicine. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Mrs. Stowe put into the mouth of her Yankee woman visiting the South the descriptive words, "Oh heow shiftless!" Now comes Professor Stiles and tells us that "anaemia, malnutrition, marked indisposition for sustained exertion, and resultant social condition, usually described as 'shiftlessness,' which have characterized large numbers of the poorer class of rural whites in the South, are due to a widespread infection with the *Uncinaria americana*, or hookworm."⁶

It would be a rational ground for hilarity, to make even a Quaker or a Puritan laugh, if some of the worst demons of economic vice could be expelled from the system with a good dose of vermifuge. Who shall set a bound to science?

The form of the topic limits our discussion to description of present facts, and, rigidly interpreted, would not permit us to consider how far these actual evils are remediable nor by what means. Of course the greater and only final human interest lies in the methods of amelioration provided by the sciences of sanitation, public hygiene, and education.

But the detection and description of the adverse factors implies the possession of a standard and the consciousness of the wrong as wrong. This is in itself an important step on the way to betterment.

A multitude of people will, for good reasons, choose rural homes; another multitude will select urban homes; both may be aided to live a rational life with wholesome surroundings; both can, up to the measure of their capacity, live a complete human life; and already men in institutions of learning, on farms, in cities, and in administrative positions are seeking the ways to the best possible life for farmers and residents of cities.

⁶ Dr. H. B. Young, *N. Y. Medical Journal*, November 28, 1908, p. 1028.

The literary and scientific man is tempted to regard the farmer as lacking in intellectual quality because the latter has not expressed his ideas in melodious phrases or buried them in laboratory memoirs.

If we look closely we can discover that farmers have really a vast fund of valuable knowledge—knowledge of vegetables, animals, wounds, diseases, remedies, technical processes, government, law, markets, prices, transportation. The farmer is an experimenter. All he learns he expresses, not in literary form, in articles in books, but in improved land, in selecting according to biological principles the best seeds and the best stock for breeding, in adapting his methods to climate and soil, in building up schools and churches, and in rearing healthy children.

We need not be too industrious in making out *differences* between rural and urban populations. The differences in homes, habits, and satisfactions on which comic cartoonists and some social philosophers lay emphasis either do not exist, except in imagination, or are merely superficial. The broad hat, rough boots, wild beard, and exposed suspenders of the caricatured “hayseed” have little meaning in respect to the essentials of human character. The city dweller judges by what he sees and he does not see much of the real farmer. Many of the railroad kings, whom our British ambassador praises as the ablest men of our nation, are the children of “clod-hoppers” and may retain a little of the ancestral trick of getting over rough ground to their destination. We need to be on our guard against hasty, unfair, and misleading generalizations, and the prejudices of our Brahmin caste. Many of our rich men, under expert medical advice, are living a rural life several months of each year for physical and mental health. They are wise who return periodically to the conditions of life which have thus far helped to maintain the vitality of our nation at the highest point. The aristocracy of England, and their imitators, are ambitious to own and occupy country seats. This will lengthen the life of this group—not always with eugenic consequences.

But what of the poor in our cities, whose crowded rooms are pestilential in winter and purgatorial in summer? Is the best

we can do for these to send them to the country for a week, or give dying babes a charity ride in a floating hospital? Are even the small park and playground, the miniature reminder of real country, the horizon of our vision? We have already adopted in our building ordinances a minimum standard of cubic atmosphere and square feet of window space for actinic rays; but as yet we have not come in sight of a standard of outdoor space per man, woman and child. We are merely making unscientific guesses and leaving the real control of sky and grass room to individualism and commercial motives, that is, to the besotted and the blind. In many cases suburban manufacturing villages, built to escape the rule of trade-unions, soon develop unsanitary conditions of smoke, dust, unwholesome housing, and bad drainage and water supply, without securing any of the advantages of moral surroundings.

A more comprehensive system of social control is required in order to promote social selection economically and effectively. What direction must this control take?

1. It has been proposed that we try to educate the prosperous and healthy to produce more children. In the first *Report of the Committee on Eugenics* of the American Breeders' Association it was urged:

It is a pressing problem to know what to do to increase the birth-rate of the superior stocks and keep proportionate at least the contribution of the inferior stocks. One of the most promising influences is the eugenic movement started in England by Galton and Pearson to make proper procreation a part of religion and ethics, rather than a matter of whim only. . . . Our appeal should . . . be directed to men of average ability to have families which will bring at least two children to maturity and parenthood and especially to men of superior ability to have larger families.

With this conclusion and with this appeal there can be no reasonable ground for controversy. Unquestionably something can be gained by persuading people to consider procreation from the point of view of racial interest and patriotism. The Roman Catholic church has certainly succeeded in Canada and the United States by urging its members to outpopulate the Protestants; whether always with eugenic results must be a matter for

further investigation. At any rate the universal and persistent teaching and counsel in the confessional secures results; general freedom from divorce and from childless marriages. If this mighty religious influence could be made *scientific* and eugenic—and why not?—it would be an immense help toward improving our American stock.

But there is a limit to the willingness and the duty of persons of ability and health. If they should really try to run a race with the thriftless, the reckless, the dwarfs, the neurotic, the vicious, the criminal, the insane, the feeble-minded, what would be the outlook? Can we seriously urge this policy without further measures? The effort might be too costly, might even lead to the exhaustion and degeneration of a large number of conscientious and morally earnest mothers. Society has no right to ask of such persons unreasonable sacrifices in a hopeless competition with the unrestrained appetites of the unfit and undesirable.

2. There is a way by which society can secure a better stock in one or two generations, and that is by the use of legal powers which it already exercises without raising any ethical or constitutional questions. It is not necessary to reproduce in a brief report the mass of facts collected and presented with almost passionate earnestness by Dr. Rentoul.⁷ We have at hand the celibate colonies of insane, feeble-minded, and epileptics. The policy of *segregation* nowhere raises doubt or general opposition. It is clearly and distinctly the right of a commonwealth, when called upon to support a large number of the obviously unfit, to deprive them of liberty and so prevent their propagation of defects and thus the perpetuation of their misery in their offspring.

But the policy of segregation has one disadvantage, which Dr. Rentoul has made prominent: the insane are discharged when cured, and yet become parents of degenerates; and the feeble-minded and epileptic cannot always be guarded so as to prevent propagation. Therefore the policy of painless asexualization is offered.

3. But no social policy of segregation or of asexualization can

⁷ *Race Culture or Race Suicide.*

be complete or adequate without vigorous and comprehensive measures for arresting the forces which tend to poison the germ, the very source of life and inheritance. The aim of eugenics is not limited to selection of parents; it includes all the measures which promise to improve the quality of the parents or to prevent their degradation.

It is slow and uncertain work to persuade the capable to attempt to outpopulate the defective and abnormal; society in self-defense must seek to diminish the causes of degeneration.

Several able writers on eugenics have declared that we cannot look to improvement of conditions for improvement of the human race. Granting that better food and housing will not enable tuberculous and paralytic parents to produce healthy offspring, it remains true that impaired wages, nutrition, and wholesome conditions would prevent the beginning of a new series of degraded and exhausted persons.

It seems to be established, and admitted by Weismann, that the germ cells in their most intimate structure can be so affected by poisons and even by malnutrition as to transmit certain evil effects to offspring. Therefore it is not necessary to enter upon a discussion of the controverted topic of the inheritance of acquired characters. The sperm cells or the ovum or both may be so damaged in the parent or parents that the offspring will show the consequences. Forel writes:

By blastophthory (*Keimverderbnis*) I understand . . . the effects of all directly abnormal and disturbing influences which affect the protoplasm of the germ cells, whose inherited determinants in this way are injuriously altered. Blastophthory works in this way on germs not yet united by means of their bearers (*Träger*) and in that way effects a beginning of what we call inherited degeneration, of whatever kind it may be.

These evil results then pass on from this beginning to subsequent generations. Among the poisons which have the power to damage the germ cells Forel mentions especially alcohol. Idiots, insane, epileptics, dwarfs, psychopathic persons are the issue of alcholized parents, parents who themselves may have been vigorous and sound in every part.

⁸ *Blastophthory (Keimverderbnis)*; cf. Aug. Forel, *Die sexuelle Frage*, p. 33.

This brings into consideration the facts relating to other poisons; as the toxic results of tuberculosis and other diseases, of lead poisoning, phosphorus poisoning, and nicotine in strong doses. The so-called industrial or professional diseases gain a new interest in this connection.

The contest with venereal diseases, both gonorrhea and syphilis, becomes significant for eugenics. It is well known that syphilis acquired by a parent sometimes destroys or cripples the offspring. Gonorrhea is a common cause of blindness; the inherited effects upon the constitution of the children require serious investigation. Dr. E. Kraepelin says:

We know some of the important and widespread causes of insanity, the combating of which lies not only within the realm of the duties, but also of the powers of the state. The first of these is the abuse of alcohol. . . . About one-third of the surviving children of dipsomaniac parents will become epileptics. According to Bourneville more than one-half of the idiotic children proved to have alcoholized parents.⁹

This author, with many others, emphasizes the frequent connection between even slight intoxication and the occasion of venereal diseases with all their sad retinue of suffering, especially to women.

Some educational advantage may be gained by laws requiring a medical certificate of health from a public physician as a condition of receiving a license to marry. This measure would cause many a young man to reflect before he brought upon himself a loathsome and highly infectious disease. But such a law would have little influence on unscrupulous persons who satisfy their appetites without regard to marriage laws. They must be reached by other means.

Competition with the inferior and the unfit is one of the influences which cause thoughtful and provident persons to limit their offspring. This was the conclusion of one of our greatest economists, President Francis A. Walker:

Whatever were the causes which checked the growth of the native population, they were neither physiological nor climatic. They were mainly social and economic; and chief among them was the access of vast

⁹ *Die psychiatrischen Aufgaben des Staates*, p. 2.

hordes of foreign immigrants, bringing with them a standard of living at which our own people revolted.¹⁰

Now, the excessive increase of any undesirable class will "give a shock to the principle of population" among persons of higher standards of life. Thousands of persons of the Society of Friends and others who would not or could not own slaves emigrated from the South before the Civil War to escape competition with slave labor and from the sense of social inferiority which went with manual labor. But now there is no way of escape; therefore the families of superior ability and higher standards grow smaller. To encourage persons of normal life and civilized standards to have more children some better guarantees must be given them by government that these children will not be driven to the wall by immigrants of a lower order. This is not an argument against immigration, but only against the immigration of persons who can never be induced to demand a civilized scale of life. A great deal is justly said of a "simple life;" but that should not mean a return to savage life.

Any discussion of the unfavorable effects of urban life on the family must give large room for these forces which tend directly or indirectly to enfeeble or prevent offspring. The vices which destroy, the unwholesome physical conditions, and the excessive competition in cities of the North with immigrants are all amenable to action by concerted volition; they are not results of inevitable forces outside the range of human choices.

¹⁰ *Discussions in Economics and Statistics*, Vol. II, p. 426.